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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 003932

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STATE FOR EAP/MTS

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SUBJECT: RESCHEDULED VILLAGE ELECTIONS SET FOR DECEMBER 15

REF: A. MANILA 3576 (NATIONWIDE VILLAGE ELECTIONS SEE
HIGH TURNOUT AND LOWER VIOLENCE)

[1](#)B. MANILA 3547 (PHILIPPINES TO HOLD FIRST
NATIONWIDE VILLAGE ELECTIONS SINCE 2002)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Special elections will be held on December 15 in 360 villages that were unable to carry out regular voting during the nationwide elections on October 29 in 42,000 villages. The Commission on Elections declared "failures of election" in these areas for various reasons, including non-delivery of voting paraphernalia, failure of election officials to report to work, and harassment of poll workers and volunteers. While these villages represent a small proportion of the 42,000 nationwide, many are traditional hot-spots for election-related violence and voting irregularities, with the majority situated in Muslim Mindanao. The Commission expects polls to be generally peaceful and orderly; however, a recent explosion at the Commission's Jolo office on December 8 has forced police to increase planned deployments for Saturday's elections. The Mission's election observation efforts will include the dispatch of political staff to the polling places in Metro Manila and an extensive USAID-supported election monitoring program in Mindanao. End Summary.

Rescheduled Elections in Some Villages

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Commission on Elections will hold village and youth elections on December 15 in 360 "barangays" (the smallest political districts in the Philippine political system) where the Commission declared a "failure of election" in the October 29 village and youth council elections. While the October 29 elections in some 42,000 barangays were generally peaceful and orderly, a small number of barangay elections were unmanageable. Failures of election are most often declared because of violence or harassment of voters or poll workers; however, Commission officials noted that a variety of circumstances can force the Commission to reschedule the elections: failure of poll workers to report to work, or in some cases, the non-delivery of election materials to a particular polling site.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Commission expects 65 to 75 percent of over 172,000 registered voters to turn out at the polls for the barangay council elections and 75 to 80 percent of the approximately 15,000 registered youth voters (aged 15 to 17) to turn out for the youth council elections. The overwhelming majority of the 360 villages where special elections are to be held are situated in Muslim Mindanao (specifically in the provinces of Zamboanga Sibugay, Bukidnon, Lanao del Norte, and Maguindanao, as well as

Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Shariff Kabunsuan and Sulu in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM)). Special elections will be also held in seven villages in the Luzon region, including two villages in metro Manila, and in 21 villages in the Visayas region, with a high concentration in the Samar Province, a long-time hotbed of the Communist New People's Army.

Preparing for Possible Violence

14. (SBU) Western Mindanao and the ARMM are traditional hot-spots for election-related violence and voting irregularities. Intense political rivalries and the presence of armed insurgents intensifies the propensity for election failures. While the lead-up to the December 15 special elections has been relatively quiet, an explosive device was detonated on December 8, immediately outside of the Jolo office of the Commission on Elections. While the explosion caused no deaths or injuries, its message may have been to intimidate election officials. The police continue to investigate the explosion and have increased deployments through the ARMM for the election period. The Commission imposed a total gun ban in the election areas and has even prohibited candidates from employing bodyguards during the election period.

15. (C) After the explosion at the Commission's Jolo office, some officials have called for increased military presence at the polling sites to ensure peaceful elections. Major General Rafael, Commander of the AFP's Sulu operations, told the Ambassador that the Armed Forces should help administer the special elections in Sulu, where more than 50 villages

MANILA 00003932 002 OF 002

will hold special elections. General Nelson Allaga, Chief of the AFP's Western Mindanao Command, similarly suggested that the military should offer assistance in selected areas, since the troops may be viewed as "neutral outsiders." However, both Rafael and Allaga noted that the Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro is adamant that the military should not play a role in the elections, to avoid politicization and accusations of military involvement in any election irregularities. Teodoro's policy was instituted by his predecessor, Secretary Cruz, after accusations of military involvement in election irregularities in 2004.

Comment

16. (C) While violence and fraud may affect some districts on election day, the Commission on Elections and the police are taking the necessary steps to ensure a freer, fairer, and more peaceful process for this second attempt. Elections Commissioner Rene Sarmiento said that the Commission and the police have more than adequate manpower to oversee this smaller electoral process, dispatching the officials to these villages almost a week in advance of election day. Given the propensity for violence and voter fraud in Mindanao and the ARMM, Post plans to closely follow the polling activities in these areas. The USAID-supported Coalition for ARMM Electoral Reform (Citizens CARE) will deploy its officers to monitor voting and counting in all six provinces of the ARMM, while several of the Mission's political officers will observe polling in Metro Manila.

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